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California Officials to Discuss Prison Conditions, Sentencing and Rehabilitation Issues With American Bar Association Commission. Oakland Mayor, Director of California Corrections Department, Sacramento District Attorney, and California Cabinet Secretary Expected to Testify.

With 55 percent of the California's parolees returning to prison within two years, the state has the highest recidivism rate in the country. That statistic, coupled with increased incarceration of nonviolent offenders under California's controversial "Three Strikes" law, has generated a debate over balancing budgetary and crime control considerations. Is the "Three Strikes" law working? What services are being provided to prisoners in state custody and after their return to the community? Can those services help reduce the state's corrections budget while easing offenders' reintegration into society and reducing recidivism rates?

The American Bar Association Justice Kennedy Commission will address these and other criminal justice issues during its third public hearing, which will be held April 15 at the McGeorge School of Law in Sacramento. Beginning at 9 a.m., the commission will hear testimony from judges, corrections officials, state legislators, prisoner advocates and victims' rights advocates.

The ABA Justice Kennedy Commission was formed by ABA President Dennis W. Archer in October 2003 in response to remarks by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony M. Kennedy in a speech to the ABA Annual Meeting that August. In those remarks, Justice Kennedy highlighted the "inadequacies -- and the injustices -- in our prison and correctional systems." Archer formed the commission to address those issues and appointed George Washington University Law Professor Stephen A. Saltzburg as its chair.

During the hearing in Sacramento, which follows hearings in November 2003 in Washington, D.C., and February 2004 in San Antonio, the commission will hear from two panels of respected California criminal justice experts. Among the witnesses are:

- Cabinet Secretary Roderick Hickman;
- California State Sen. Gloria Romero;
- Michael Alpert, chair of the Little Hoover Commission;
- Sacramento District Attorney Jan Scully;
- Jeanne Woodford, director of the California Department of Corrections;
- Former Department of Corrections Inspector General Steve White; and
- Don Specter of the Prison Law Office.

Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown has also been invited to testify, along with judges, prisoner advocacy groups, victims' advocates, and local law enforcement officials.

For more information on the ABA Justice Kennedy Commission, please visit its Web site at <http://www.abanet.org/leadership/initiative/initiative4.html>.

The American Bar Association is the largest voluntary professional membership association in the world. With more than 400,000 members, the ABA provides law school accreditation, continuing legal education, information about the law, programs to assist lawyers and judges in their work, and initiatives to improve the legal system for the public.